



COVID-19

Access to food and what to eat

Who is this resource for?

This resource is intended to support Dietitians and other health professionals providing advice to their clients and patients. The advice provided in this resource is for the **general public** and may not be applicable to people with existing health conditions such as diabetes or cancer.

Key messages

- 1. Supermarkets remain open at all alert levels and the food supply in New Zealand is secure.**
- 2. No food, food group or supplement will prevent a person from contracting COVID-19.**
- 3. Most people infected with COVID-19 will have mild symptoms and may experience a suppressed appetite. It is important that these people drink plenty of fluids and continue to eat while recovering at home in isolation.**
- 4. For those who are well, maintain a healthy diet as much as possible by planning what to eat.**

What is Alert Level 4?

Level 4 of the Government's alert system means that it is likely that COVID-19 is not contained, and there is sustained and intensive transmission and widespread outbreaks. For a summary of the Alert Level system is available [here](#).

At Alert Level 4, the Government implements a range of measures (these can be applied locally or nationally) including: People instructed to stay at home; Educational facilities closed; Businesses closed except for essential services (e.g. supermarkets, pharmacies, clinics) and lifeline utilities; All indoor and outdoor events cancelled; Rationing of supplies and requisitioning of facilities; Major reprioritisation of healthcare services; Travel is severely limited but remains in place for essential workers and transporting freight.

Access to food during Alert Level 4 for people that are well

- Government instructions regarding essential services are updated daily, for the latest information visit [here](#).
- Supermarkets remain open at all alert levels and the food supply in New Zealand is secure (some have changed hours - check local stores online for times).

- Every restaurant, café and bar will not operate at all, this includes delivery services and takeaways.
- Delivery services of prepared meals is prohibited, except for meals-on-wheels and food ingredient delivery (e.g. subscription food boxes and supermarket orders).
- Dairies will remain open, with a one-in-one-out rule and cannot sell cooked food.
- Avoid stockpiling food and instead plan weekly meals, including breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks and corresponding weekly shopping lists.
- If possible, nominate one person in your isolation group to visit the supermarket about once a week.
- Avoid using the supermarket's online delivery service if possible, reserving supermarkets' delivery capacity for those who are unwell or not able to travel to the supermarket.
- Help your family, friends and neighbours who are unwell by dropping groceries or meals outside their door.

What to eat if well

No food or supplement will prevent a person from contracting COVID-19

- Eating a healthy diet will not prevent a person from contracting COVID-19.
- A person's immune system cannot be 'boosted' through diet. Eating a healthy, balanced diet simply supports the normal functioning of the immune system.
- There are no natural health products approved to treat or protect against COVID-19.

Maintain a healthy diet as much as possible

- Plenty of vegetables and fruit (frozen and fresh), legumes, wholegrain foods, and some milk and dairy products (or alternatives), and/or some seafood, eggs, chicken or red meat.
- For those with specialist dietary requirements e.g. Type 2 Diabetes, Coeliac Disease, should continue to follow relevant and specific dietary advice of health professionals.
- If possible, make a weekly meal plan and a shopping list for any new ingredients needed. This can also help to manage food budgets and enable shared allocation of cooking responsibilities.
- Most people are likely to have a small freezer space. Utilise this space for frozen vegetables and fruit, and freezing leftovers if able to undertake batch cooking.

- Create virtual eating opportunities: schedule time to connect with family and friends online during mealtimes.
- Use up perishable ingredients before foods with a longer shelf life. Vegetables with a long shelf life include potatoes, kūmara, carrots, onions, taro and pumpkin.
- Experiment with dried beans and legumes like chickpeas and lentils, soak them in plenty of water the night before and cook according to recipe.
- The [Heart Foundation](#) has recipe books online providing detailed tips for cost saving, cupboard and freezer foods, how to cook dried beans, and many recipes. Check out [Affordable Eats](#), [Full o' Beans](#) and [Cheap Eats](#).
- The [Healthy Food Guide website](#) also has an entire library of useful recipes.

Access to food during Alert Level 4 for people at home in isolation due to:

- 1. Confirmed, probable and suspected COVID-19 infection**
 - 2. Awaiting COVID-19 test results**
 - 3. A close contact of a probable, suspected or confirmed case**
 - 4. Anyone who has returned from overseas travel**
- Government instructions regarding essential services are updated daily, for the latest information visit [here](#).
 - Supermarkets will remain open at all alert levels and are continuing online food delivery services.
 - Every restaurant, café and bar will not operate at all, this includes delivery services and takeaways.
 - Delivery of prepared meals is prohibited, except for meals-on-wheels and food ingredient delivery (e.g. subscription food boxes and supermarket orders).
 - Dairies will remain open, with a one-in-one-out rule and cannot sell cooked food.
 - If possible, organise with your family, friends and neighbours who are well to drop supermarket supplies and/or prepared food to your door.
 - Food Standards Australia New Zealand says there is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through food and that people with confirmed, probable and suspected cases of COVID-19 should avoid preparing food for others.

What to eat if unwell with mild COVID-19 symptoms

Those people with severe symptoms and who are hospitalised, will require specialist dietetic care specific to their needs.

The Ministry of Health continually updates its guidance for those who care confirmed, probable or suspected COVID-19 infections, who do not need to be hospitalised, and those confirmed with COVID-19 infection who were hospitalised and for whom hospitalisation is medically not required anymore.

The Ministry of Health's process for the need to escalate a patient's level of care (if symptoms become worse) is managed by local public health staff. Local public health teams manage contact and instructions with those who are confirmed, probable or suspected COVID-19 infected patients. More information can be found [here](#).

Most people infected with COVID-19 will have mild symptoms and may experience a suppressed appetite. It is important that these people **drink plenty of fluids** and **continue to eat** while recovering at home in isolation.

There may be some drinks and foods which are more palatable than others and **ingesting small amounts more frequently** may be more manageable.

Suitable drinks for those unwell include water, juice, milk-based drinks, tea and coffee. Soup's also provide the opportunity to take in liquid. Alcoholic beverages should not be consumed.

Foods easy to chew and swallow, and digest are more likely to be eaten by someone who is unwell such as breads, soft fruits, soups, eggs, yoghurt, and cooked vegetables.